

# Suicide can leave family, friends full of anger, guilt, despair

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Dee Burt

After Dee Burt's first husband took his life in 1987, feelings of anger, guilt and depression plunged her into a dark abyss from which escape seemed hopeless.

Because she can still remember the sense of deep despair she felt during those days, she is serving as chairwoman for the second annual [Out of the Darkness Community Walk](#), which will take place Oct. 10 at the Indiana University football stadium.

The walk, organized by the Indiana chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, is designed to raise funds for and awareness about suicide, and to support those who've lost friends or family members to suicide.

"We're losing more than 30,000 people in the U.S. to suicide annually, and 80 percent of those are preventable," Burt said.

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"We want to help people notice suicide warning signs in their loved ones, and urge people contemplating suicide to call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Hotline — 1-800-273-TALK."

Burt, an elementary special education teacher in the Richland-Bean Blossom schools, said the Indiana chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is also concerned about suicide survivors.

"It's estimated that an average of 10 people are intimately affected by each suicide, which means there are more than 300,000 survivors of suicide annually," she said. "And survivors are more at risk to attempt or complete suicide than nonsurvivors, because they often feel guilty for not seeing it coming."

### **'Our last conversation'**

Burt said in the weeks preceding her first husband's suicide, he was clinically depressed and frighteningly angry.

"Nick threatened to kill me and my parents, and we were all afraid of him," she said. "Our last conversation was on the phone, and it did not go well. I told him I was taking the children and leaving him."

Burt and the kids moved into a friend's spare home, a beautiful brick house in an upscale neighborhood.

"We were terrified," she said. "I didn't dare tell him where we were."

Burt had previously urged Nick to get counseling, but he had staunchly refused. She never imagined for a moment that he would take his life.

### **'Just the saddest thing'**

Thinking Nick was in Florida with his best friend, Burt loaded the children into the car one day and drove to their home to pick up some of the kids' clothing and favorite toys.

"As I drove up to the house, I started to feel sick," she said. "Somehow my body sensed something was wrong."

When she and the kids walked inside, they heard a radio playing. Feeling uneasy, they went into the kitchen and found a hand-scrawled note on the kitchen table that said, "No Need Nick."

By this time, a neighbor had joined them in the house. The neighbor went to the garage, looking for Nick. He found him slumped over in his car, dead from carbon monoxide poisoning.

To this day, Burt is not able to decipher the meaning of Nick's suicide note.

"I've analyzed it from every angle, but it remains a mystery," she said. "It's just the saddest thing."

### **Nightmares**

After the suicide, Burt was broadsided by relentless waves of emotion — anger, confusion, guilt.

"I'd have nightmares in which I would replay our last conversation, then try to change it into something more pleasant," she said.

Often, she would wake up in the middle of the night, walk outside into her backyard and repeatedly kick a ball against the fence.

"I was so angry at him, and angry at myself, because I felt partially responsible for his death," she said. "Then I would feel guilty about being angry at someone who was so sad."

### **Bottom line: forgiveness**

Burt joined a suicide survivors support group.

"I wanted to hear someone tell me that someday I could feel happy again," she said. "One day I asked our facilitator what the bottom line was, and he said forgiveness. I had to forgive Nick, and I had to forgive myself."

She also found that walking helped lift her mood.

"I wouldn't come back from my walk until I could think of at least one happy thought," she said. "Sometimes I had to walk for a long time before I came home, but eventually those happy thoughts began to help me."

Eventually, she wrote a book, "One Side of Suicide," in which she describes her personal journey from surviving to thriving, and writes about such things as forgiveness, acceptance and self care.

She says she found it therapeutic to put her thoughts on paper, and hopes those thoughts provide help and comfort to others.

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## **Suicide warning signs**

Threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself.

Looking for ways to kill oneself by seeking access to firearms, pills or other means.

Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person.

Feeling hopeless.

Feeling rage or uncontrolled anger or seeking revenge.

Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking.

Feeling trapped — like there's no way out.

Increasing alcohol or drug use.

Withdrawing from friends, family and society.

Feeling anxious or agitated; being unable to sleep or sleeping all the time.

Experiencing dramatic mood changes.

Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

## **Burt to talk about prevention Sept. 16**

Dee Burt will talk about suicide prevention at 7 p.m. Sept. 16 at the Monroe County Public Library. The talk is being sponsored by Bloomington Hospital.

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